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Citation for published version:

Macallister, J 2018, 'Ronald W. Hepburn on wonder and the education of emotions and subjectivity', *Journal of Scottish Thought*, vol. 10, pp. 123-138. <<https://www.store.abdn.ac.uk/product-catalogue/publications/research-institute-of-irish-and-scottish-studies/journal-of-scottish-thought-volume-10>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal of Scottish Thought

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R. W. Hepburn on Wonder and the Education of Emotions and Subjectivity

James MacAllister

In this paper I consider Ronald Hepburn's writings on education. Though Hepburn did not try to articulate a general philosophy or theory of education, he – like his contemporary Scottish philosophers: John Macmurray and Alasdair MacIntyre – did provide an account of how engagement with the arts can educate emotions.¹ According to Hepburn, emotions are at least partly cognitive states and so educable. The arts (and especially literature) can educate the emotions in various ways: by enlarging experience beyond the trite emotion clichés of everyday life; by enhancing self-knowledge and emotional freedom, by revivifying and revitalising emotional experience, and by improving our understanding and relations with other people. In the paper I also consider Gordon Reddiford's objection that Hepburn erred in suggesting that aesthetic criteria could settle scientific questions. I argue this objection does not convince as Hepburn only defended the thesis that it is vital that educators teach students that the sciences do not represent the only path to knowledge of reality. Hepburn believed that the arts and journey's in nature (both lived and literary) can also disclose reality in educationally valuable ways. To help illustrate the educative power of journeying, I refer to the journey that the character Kenn undertakes in Neil Gunn's novel *Highland River*. Contrary to Reddiford, I conclude that for Hepburn not all education is education of subjectivity. Instead, I draw upon Hepburn's reflections on wonder to show that it is more likely that he thought it important to educate for both objectivity (through the sciences) and subjectivity (through the humanities and appreciation of art and nature).

1. Introduction

¹ In different ways both John Macmurray and Alasdair MacIntyre stress how engagement with the arts can educate emotions. In a public lecture of 1958, for example, Macmurray suggests that the arts can educate emotions by helping students overcome the human tendency to self-deceit and egocentricity, cf. John Macmurray, 'Learning to be Human', *Oxford Review of Education*, 38 (2012), 661–74. While MacIntyre suggests that human beings are story telling animals that need to tell each other stories in order to work out what it really means to live well and badly, cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana, 1984). As we shall see, Hepburn also thinks that engagement with the arts, and especially literature, can help foster a more truthful and real understanding of the human condition.

Ronald Hepburn was a pivotal figure in the revival of interest in environmental aesthetics in the latter half of the twentieth century. His work on education by contrast has been much less influential. This is perhaps unsurprising. Only two papers he wrote had education as the focus. As far as I am aware only two further papers, one by Konstantin Koopman and another by Gordon Reddiford,² engage in any depth with Hepburn's writing on education. Koopman's engagement is brief, extending to little more than two paragraphs of summary of Hepburn's first paper on education. Reddiford's engagement is more substantial but only focuses on Hepburn's second paper on education. A third article, by Chung-Ping Yang³ does not discuss Hepburn's work on education but does consider the implications of his aesthetic theory for aesthetic education. Finally, Steven Fesmire quotes from Hepburn's famous essay on the neglect of natural beauty of 1966 in discussion of the ecological imagination and moral education.⁴ However, Fesmire's chapter again proceeds without reference to Hepburn's views on education. What none of these papers do, then, is consider Hepburn's published works on education together with discussion of his views on aesthetics. My paper therefore examines both of Hepburn's neglected works on education and it relates them to some of his work in environmental aesthetics.

2. The arts and the education of feeling and emotion

Hepburn's first work on education was a paper 'The Arts and the Education of Feeling and Emotion' which was published in 1972 within a philosophy of education anthology called *Education and the Development of Reason* but also later republished in a collection of Hepburn's own works, *Wonder and Other Essays*.⁵ What does Hepburn say about the emotions and emotion education in this essay? At the start of the essay Hepburn makes clear he is not trying to articulate a general theory or philosophy of education. Instead, he intends to look at a very specific aspect of education – the education of emotions through

² Konstantin Koopman, 'Art and Aesthetics in Education' in Richard Bailey, Robin Barrow et al (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (London, 2010), 435–50; Gordon Reddiford, 'Subjectivity and the Arts: how Hepburn could be an objectivist', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 26 (1992), 107–11.

³ Yang Chun-Ping, 'Hepburn's Natural Aesthetic and It's Implications for Aesthetic Education', *International Education Studies*, 6 (2013), 225–31.

⁴ Steven Fesmire, 'Ecological Imagination and the Aims of Moral Education Through the Kyoto School and American Pragmatism' in Paul Standish & Naiko Saito (eds), *Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy: Pedagogy for human transformation* (London, 2012), 109–30.

⁵ Ronald Hepburn, 'The Arts and the Education of Feeling and Emotion' in Robert Dearden, Paul Hirst & Richard Peters (eds), *Education and the development of reason* (London, 1972), 484–500; idem, *Wonder and Other Essays: Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh, 1984), 88–107.

appreciation of the arts. Hepburn takes issue with the 'traditional' view of emotion which construed them as wholly inner, private experiences of pure sensation. He points out that if this account of the emotions was right, it is hard to see how they could be educable. He says:

[w]e might speak of checking, controlling and suppressing private, inner feelings. But what about transforming and civilising emotions, or rendering them more discriminating, appropriate, reasonable, sensitive? If these questions are intractable, it is because that traditional view of emotions as inner feelings is inadequate.⁶

In contrast to the traditional view, Hepburn defended a cognitive account of emotions. On this view emotions are not just inner experiences. They are also directed at external objects. Hepburn maintained that to experience an emotion is not just to perceive an inner feeling – it is also to evaluate facts about the world. He concluded that emotions can be educated as they involve not just a passive feeling but also an evaluative component.

He maintained that the evaluative and cognitive elements of emotion can be pulled together by the notion of 'seeing as'.⁷ What Hepburn seems to be getting at is that emotions can be justified or without grounds. A justified emotion, an emotion that is, that a person has solid grounds for having, is one where that person has come to see reality as it really is. They have pulled their inner sensation together with an apt cognitive judgement about the object or objects that the sensation is directed. Having clarified what sort of phenomena Hepburn thinks emotions are, he turns to the issue of educating emotions. Hepburn suggested that emotion education can and should perform a variety of functions. It can firstly oust vague, crude emotion clichés and replace them with ones more discriminating and true to the facts of individual human experience.⁸ Hepburn thought engagement with works of literature, such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, can enable such emotion education. According to Hepburn, Tolstoy can educate as he can *enlarge emotional experience*. He can do this by taking his readers out of everyday life, where

⁶ Hepburn, 'The Arts and the Education of Feeling and Emotion', 484.

⁷ Ibid., 485.

⁸ Ibid., 485–6.

emotions are generally liable to be clichéd and hackneyed, and into an imagined world that has precise, authentic accounts of individual human feeling. Hepburn cites a passage from Tolstoy's novel that describes a character's (Levin's) emotional response to seeing his new child for the first time. The response contains the expected joy but also entirely new and unanticipated aspects. What Levin felt was not simple joy, but a tortuous awareness of liability to new pain, that only slowly evolved in to joy and pride. Such passages in literature educate by affirming the complexity of emotional life and 'by eliciting a new way of seeing'.⁹ The educational possibilities of art do not end here. According to Hepburn, engagement with works of literature can help readers to better understand and relate with others. This is so as the precise accounts of individual human emotion that good novels contain, can support readers to empathize, to imaginatively put themselves in the place of others and feel what they feel.¹⁰

Moreover, literature can also help readers to have more fine grained and true to life knowledge of their own emotions. Tolstoy's reader, he says, is 'much less likely to disavow the complexity of his own emotions ... and is far better equipped to acknowledge, and find words to articulate, fugitive and unmapped forms of feeling'.¹¹ Successful art can help people to be honest and sincere about the knotty, entangled, sometimes difficult, nature of their own emotions. For Hepburn such aesthetic education is generative of personal and moral freedom – what he calls 'emotional freedom'. He comments that

the emotion-cliché, the stereotype, can be seen as a trap; for it says ... that this is the only option for feeling in this sort of situation. In contrast an aesthetic education is an introduction to countless alternative possibilities for feeling: the options are shown to be immeasurably more diversified than the clichés allow.¹²

Hepburn maintains that *emotional freedom* is the antithesis of *freedom from emotion*. The latter involves a certain deadness of feeling, or at least a partial withdrawal from the realm of feeling. The former in contrast entails a stance of fundamental openness to the reality of emotional life and to the infinite variety

⁹ Ibid., 486.

¹⁰ Ibid., 490–491.

¹¹ Ibid., 487.

¹² Ibid., 488.

of feelings that are humanly possible. For Hepburn emotional life can be revived and recharged by art experiences that foster emotional freedom. Hepburn thus maintained the arts (and especially literature) can educate emotions in various ways: by enlarging experience beyond the trite emotion clichés of everyday life; by enhancing self-knowledge and emotional freedom, by revivifying and revitalizing emotional experience, and by improving our understanding and relations with other people.

3. Hepburn confronting some objections

Middle way through his essay, Hepburn confesses that he has been up to that point deliberately presenting a blandly one-sided and optimistic account of the ways in which the arts can educate emotion. He therefore spends the rest of the essay confronting possible objections to, and possibly negative features of his account. He firstly notes that his understanding of emotion could be questioned. Here he concedes that not all emotions are necessarily directed at objects. However, he maintains that even where emotions do not have objects, such emotions can be experienced more or less discriminatingly. The implication being that engagement with art-works can help students to experience objectless emotions, more discerningly. Another more fundamental objection he notes runs as follows – that in creating a new possibility of feeling, art-works might supplant one popular emotion-cliché with another. Here he comments on how characters in novels that initially eschew cultural norms of feeling, can over time, like the existential rebel, come to embody a new cultural stereotype. The danger being that the more art-works are valued for emotion education, the more likely it is that people may become distant from and mistrustful of their own lived emotions. Instead, they may come to need the ‘reassuring authority’¹³ of art to tell them what it is they feel or ought to. Hepburn thinks educators can devise strategies to minimise this risk.

They should firstly expose students to as wide a range of artworks as possible, from many different time periods, and not just rely on one or two contemporary writers. This is needed, as such authors may be especially susceptible to inducing new emotion clichés. Educators can also keep asking questions that encourage students to argue over whether emotions represented in the works of art are the

¹³ Ibid., 494.

only ones possible or if they are only creative fabrications, one possible set of emotional responses to a situation amongst others. If students learn to continually ask such questions of the art-works they engage with, Hepburn thinks it more likely they will be left emotionally revitalised and free by the art experience and less likely to go on to replace new emotion clichés with old. Hepburn also confronts the possible objection that while engagement with arts *can* enhance emotional freedom, it is far from clear that they must. He acknowledges that a weakness of artistic representations of feelings or philosophical ideas is that they generally do not come with grounds that evidence why that feeling or idea is being represented and not another. He states that ‘plays, poems and novels rarely contain philosophy as such. Philosophy is essentially argument, the presenting and defending of grounds for claims made and views presented. In a work of art, however, a view is presented characteristically, *without* its grounds, without a systematic sifting of evidence and alternatives’.¹⁴

In response to this concern, Hepburn reiterates the importance of understanding emotions in partly cognitive terms. If it is accepted that emotions are educable cognitive states, then educators can and should encourage students to see emotions as always involving active appraisals and interpretations of situations, appraisals that can be true to reality or not. Hepburn maintained that educators should teach students to question whether a given emotion is truly grounded in reality or not or if other emotional responses are possible or have more warrant. Indeed, Hepburn implies it is because artworks generally present emotions without grounds that *aesthetic education* as opposed to *indoctrination* is vital. He argued that processes of indoctrination, instil non-rational beliefs in students, beliefs without grounds. In contrast, ‘to be educated is to be put in a position to choose, knowing the alternatives, the pros and cons, the strengths of the case’.¹⁵ An objection that Hepburn did not consider, but should have, concerns the extent to which literature can help students to better understand and relate with others. Just because literature might help readers understand fictional characters better does not mean that readers will automatically be better able to understand and relate with others in real life. Fiction is fiction and life is life. The two can meet and enrich each other, but they need not.

¹⁴ Ibid., 495.

¹⁵ Ibid., 498.

Hepburn seemed aware of the limitations of his essay as he concluded it by remarking, perhaps too modestly, that he has done nothing more than provide two rhetorics on emotion education. One that defends the need to educate the emotions and human subjectivity, another that discredits this idea. The essay which preceded Hepburn's in the philosophy of education anthology was by Richard Peters.¹⁶ Peters also took the topic of emotion education as his focus. While Hepburn did not refer to Peters' work on emotion education in his own paper, he did suggest it to readers of *Wonder and Other Essays* as a source of further reading on emotions and emotion education.¹⁷ Hepburn shared with Peters the view that emotions are cognitive states that can be educated. He also agreed with Peters on another matter - that one of the main tasks of emotion education is to help those being educated to become attuned with reality. However, while Peters felt emotion education could connect students to reality by fostering their capacity for *objectivity*,¹⁸ as we shall see, Hepburn felt emotion education could and should attune students to reality by enhancing their *subjectivity*.¹⁹

4. Art, truth and the education of subjectivity

The thought-model with which we very often represent to ourselves the road towards truth or fuller knowledge of reality is one that involves a stripping away of anthropomorphic accretions and deposits, a process of reducing ... whereas for the productions of art the influential thought-models are of projecting, humanising, interposing a lens, or a temperament. Although art no doubt works for a maximising of interpretative and emotive enrichments, the implications of these thought-models must be that we are thereby *distanced* from truth and knowledge of reality. Such thought-models need critical scrutiny; their importance can hardly be exaggerated for someone educating in the field of the arts²⁰

¹⁶ Richard Peters, 'The education of the emotions' in *Education and the development of reason*, 466–83.

¹⁷ Hepburn, *Wonder and Other Essays*, 184–5.

¹⁸ Peters, 'The education of the emotions', 476–7

¹⁹ Ronald Hepburn, 'Art, Truth and the Education of Subjectivity', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 24 (1990), 185–98.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

Hepburn only mentions the education of subjectivity once in passing at the end of his first essay on education. In his second published work on education, *Art, Truth and the Education of Subjectivity*, the issue takes centre stage. Hepburn introduces two divergent thought models for pursuing truth and knowledge in order to explain the idea, and importance of, educating for subjectivity. One thought-model is the objectifying way, the other is the subjectivising way. The objectifying way is the way of the sciences. It involves forming claims about the world that can be tested in controlled experiments, claims that can be verified or falsified. The subjectivising way by contrast is the way of the humanities and arts. It involves sensitively attending to the particulars of lived human experience. It does not involve making claims about the world that can be generalised or falsified. While the former way seeks to reduce and strip away individual human experiences from the pursuit of knowledge and truth, the latter way seeks to amplify it. Hepburn remarks that though it would be decidedly odd to question whether the sciences can generate knowledge of reality, it is bordering on paradoxical to hold that the arts can. However, this is the claim Hepburn defends. He argues that such dualistic thought-models require careful interrogation as the arts and the sciences can both usher in valuable truths grounded in reality. Just truths of a different sort. A key task Hepburn sets himself in the paper is to get clear about the sorts of truth the arts can generate. He regards this task as an especially important one for arts educators.

Hepburn maintains that while the objectifying way can provide truths ‘about’ reality the subjectivising way can be true ‘to’ reality.²¹ Works of art can disclose aspects of reality by presenting concrete, often ‘highly evocative’ images of reality – images that invite spectators to see likenesses they may not have before. Hepburn stresses that though art can be true-to reality this is not a process of merely mirroring reality. Instead, the ‘art-work has itself been ingredient in giving shape and determinateness to the real’.²² Hepburn concludes that art is of significant educational importance as it has the power to alter human grasp of reality and make it discernible. That art can be subject to interpretation should not invariably be regarded as problematic from an epistemic or educational point of view. Indeed, art, that is open to interpretation can foster a stance of openness and questioning in those who engage with that art – a stance that can open up new possibilities of feeling and doing, new

²¹ Ibid., 186.

²² Ibid., 188.

possibilities that is, for learning. Hepburn states that the ‘implications for education are, again, manifest. Art can be presented as inculcating that open, exploratory attitude to new possibilities of experience, and as overcoming views of human possibility that are limited by ... a restrictive and crude set of popular concepts’.²³

It seems clear then that Hepburn, across both his papers on education, held that art can enlarge experience beyond the emotion clichés of everyday life and popular culture. Hepburn suggested that the foundation underpinning scepticism about the truth revealing capacities of art, lies in a general ‘disparagement of subjectivity as such’.²⁴ Those who would so disparage art are likely those who accept that the objectifying way is the only reliable way to what is ‘really real’.²⁵ For those who place total faith in the objectifying thought-model, the subjectivising way cannot be regarded as a reliable vehicle to truth as it is so heavily dependent on selective and fallible individual perceptions. When it comes to finding out the truth, trust should be placed in science not human subjectivity. In the face of such logic, Hepburn again insists it is vital that arts educators critically question thought-models that disparage the subjective ‘since any educator who accepts that overall view of the arts ... cannot fail to communicate, wittingly or unwittingly, an evaluation of their role that pushes them towards the margin of serious cognitive relevance’.²⁶

Hepburn however moves to assure arts educators, affirming that there is no good reason to exclude lived experience from the domain of the real. Indeed, he argues that human subjectivity undergirds all truth-seeking practices, even in science. He reasons that when seeking truth, human beings choose their methods of inquiry. These choices can only ever be made by subjective human agents in the experiential life-world. He states that ‘our choosing – to explore reality through science and the concepts of objectivity ... is itself a choice *in* the life-world’.²⁷ Hepburn concludes that every truth-seeking thought-model that disparages the very thing, human subjectivity, that makes truth-seeking possible, must be thoroughly distorting and questionable. As these thought-models rest on unjustified dualisms, he insists

²³ Ibid., 188–9.

²⁴ Ibid., 191.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 192.

that educators must resist the temptation to oppose the humanities and social sciences. Hepburn concludes that educators need to think about how to teach their students that ‘in art, as outside it, the subjectivising way can be a cognitive path’.²⁸

5. Reddiford’s objections to Hepburn’s account of subjectivity

Reddiford takes issue with Hepburn’s account of subjectivity in two ways. He firstly argues that the subjectivising way might not just be capable of being *true to* reality, it might also help individuals form truths *about* reality. To explain his gripe, he discusses *Macbeth*. He claims that some of the imaginative realisations in the play are so authoritative about the reality of lived human experience that they can be read as truths *about* human experience – truths that are objectively compelling. Reddiford thus argues that Hepburn needs to modify his account of subjectivity and admit certain aspects of objectivity into it. The aspects of objectivity he has in mind are any instances when art is able to represent human experience so precisely that it ‘true about us’, true that is *about* human experience.²⁹ Does this objection and subsequent argument that the category of subjectivity needs modification to include some objectivity have merit? I am not sure that it does. Reddiford seems to have forgotten or disregarded the distinctions Hepburn drew between subjectivity and objectivity. They are both *ways* to truth, but they are different ways to truth. In Hepburn’s framework an art-work such as *Macbeth* cannot create objective truths as it is not composed via the objectifying way, by scientific inquiry. When Hepburn concluded that an art-work can be true *to* human experience but not true *about* human experience he was not playing with words but making an important point about methods – they are very different in art and science. Hepburn was also affirming that the truths that art can generate can be of great human value, both in education and outside of it. When art is true to life it does not need to smuggle in aspects of objectivity for that truth to have value. Reddiford seems to have lost sight of this. However, there may be more substance to Reddiford’s second objection.

He argues that Hepburn’s suggestion that *aesthetic* criteria like elegance and beauty are at the ‘heart’ of the objectifying way is suspect. Hepburn supports this claim with reference to Heisenberg, who

²⁸ Ibid., 196.

²⁹ Reddiford, ‘Subjectivity and the Arts’, 109.

in conversation with Einstein said that if ‘nature leads us to mathematical forms of great simplicity and beauty ... that no one has previously encountered, we cannot help thinking that they are “true”, that they reveal a genuine feature of nature.’³⁰ Reddiford maintains that only a very charitable interpretation of this passage would lead to the conclusion that Heisenberg is advancing the view that aesthetic criteria are at the core of scientific truth-seeking. Reddiford is especially troubled by an implication he thinks arises from this. That while the subjectivising way can provide ‘aesthetic criteria that can settle scientific questions’³¹, the objectifying way can play no such judicial role in the arts. It should be granted that Hepburn’s assertion in question is uncertain and open to interpretation. Hepburn’s wider argument would have been stronger without this ambiguous claim. However, it is also important to ask if Hepburn really makes the argument that Reddiford attributes to him.

So far as I can tell Hepburn nowhere claims that aesthetic criteria can *settle* scientific questions. In the passage Reddiford takes issue with, Hepburn only claims that the two thought models ‘do not altogether lose sight of one another’.³² I think it is much more likely that Hepburn was merely trying to support a claim he does make – that scientists can only ever choose their methods in the world of lived emotion and human subjectivity. A world that can at times be wonderful. Hepburn elsewhere clearly expresses the view that scientific methods must govern scientific practices. He states that ‘what we can know of the objective world is necessarily approached from our experience (disciplined by the methods of science)’.³³ Overall, Reddiford’s objections to Hepburn’s account of subjectivity do not convince. Though I do not think Reddiford is right, even if Hepburn did believe aesthetic criteria could settle scientific inquiries, this would not alter the main thesis Hepburn sought to defend in his paper on the education of subjectivity. The main thesis is this: it is vital that educators teach students that the sciences do not represent the only path to knowledge of reality, and that the arts and journey’s in nature (both lived and literary) can also disclose reality in educationally valuable ways.

6. Getting real via journeying in *Highland River*

³⁰ Quoted by Hepburn in ‘Art, Truth and the Education of Subjectivity’, 193.

³¹ Reddiford, ‘Subjectivity and the Arts’, 111.

³² Hepburn, ‘Art, Truth and the Education of Subjectivity’, 193.

³³ Ibid., 192.

To bring out the folly of thinking that objectifying is the only way to reality, Hepburn asks his reader to imagine what it would be like to *journey through a landscape* where all perception of self, time, place and space, had been stripped away for the duration of the journey. He then asks his reader to restore the powers of subjectivity to the agent on the journey. The restoration will, he insists, not move the journeying agent away from but towards a fuller grasp of reality. They will be able to feel the ground under their feet, and eye ‘the hills, water, marshes’³⁴ in a way the agent devoid of subjectivity could not. They would be able to synthesise the totality of the journey in a way the agent devoid of perception could not. They could feel the depletion in energy levels over the course of their journey. They could witness the shifting patterns of light and cloud at different points in the day. By the end of the journey they will have accumulated a resource bank of perceptual memories. The imagined agent, without subjectivity, will have no such perceptual memories. As a result, *arriving* will mean much more to the agent who has really lived the journey. Hepburn suggests there are more obvious ways (other than walking in nature) by which educators can help students to get to reality via journeying. He argues that *literary journeys*, like Odysseus’s home to Ithaca, can reveal the life-world of difference between a mere change of location and really living through a journey to its end.

Is Hepburn right though? Can journeys, both lived and literary, help people to get to reality? Can journeying educate? A literary journey that can facilitate exploration of these questions can be found in Neil Gunn’s novel, *Highland River* from 1937. The first chapter in the story recounts an epic struggle between a Highland boy, Kenn, and a salmon dwelling in a river pool, by a well, near his home. Against all odds the young Kenn is able to wrestle the salmon the same size as him out of water with his bare hands. Gunn says ‘it was a saga of a fight, for all that befell Kenn afterwards, of war and horror and scientific triumphs, nothing ever quite had the splendour and glory of that struggle’.³⁵ As the novel unfolds it becomes clear just how central the Dunbeath water (the Highland River of the title) is to Kenn’s life. It was the site of his most powerful childhood experiences. It was a place for learning, for wonder in nature, as well as heroism. His schooling, by contrast, was a deadening affair, all learning of lifeless facts. Kenn had a ‘feeling of detachment from everything that went on the school ... the freedom

³⁴ Ibid., 194.

³⁵ Neil Gunn, *Highland River* (1937; Edinburgh, 1991), 5.

and thrill of life were outside ... Nor had any of the things the master taught any joy in them'.³⁶ As he grew older, Kenn would walk further and further up the river with his brother. Together they took delight in trying to describe their natural surroundings as precisely as they could. While Kenn struggled to remember the dull facts about industrial towns learned at school, they knew by name most of the birds of the area and some wildflowers too.

[However, of] the river itself, they had no time to learn the name of things. What they lost here was compensated in some degree ... by a knowledge so physical and real ... in which there was an element of pure apprehension ... freed from 'explanation', a reaction to the mystery of its reality purified of the personal emotion of vanity ... This reaction may be no more than momentary ... but is all the more vivid for that...³⁷

The novel is brought together when Kenn, now nearing middle age, returns to his Highland River. He goes on a pilgrimage to the loch that is the river's source. En route, when walking past his childhood home, now occupied by strangers, he realises it is the river and the natural world around it, that is his real home. Given Hepburn's insistence that art-works generally represent emotions without grounds, and need to be open to interpretation, I only tentatively speculate he might have shared some of the feelings and ideas expressed by Gunn. Gunn and Hepburn both suggested education is horribly impoverished if it is all scientific facts divorced from lived human experience. They both suggested that walks in nature can help human beings to perceive reality in a way that can revivify emotions. They both also grappled with whether or not scientific knowledge must come to dominate artistic, or if the two cannot co-exist.

Gunn returns to this theme more than once. He firstly has Kenn speculate that it would be quite wrong to oppose the pure apprehension of nature 'freed from explanation'³⁸ with scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge of rivers and salmon need not kill the joy of pure apprehension of them. On the contrary, his 'boyhood approaches' of the river were, though ephemeral, also indestructible and

³⁶ Ibid., 20–1.

³⁷ Ibid., 181–2.

³⁸ Ibid.

fundamental. Kenn's early experiences of the river were carried over 'to every other environment of life'.³⁹ Later when Kenn is much older and talking about his Highland past with a scientist friend, he remarks that we never really believed in the church or the clan landlord – 'that's the sort of thing that becomes clear to me when thinking of the river'. The raw, natural, wondrous power of the river was such that it could unsettle man-made norms. When asked by his friend what he really thought of the arts, Kenn responded that 'there is the purely objective and the purely subjective ... The purely objective is photographic. The purely subjective is incommunicable'.⁴⁰ Kenn lamented that the modern age had produced no great poetry. In this age 'wonder and curiosity and the thrill of new forms and new beauty are today to be found in science'.⁴¹ Hepburn may not have assented to the thought that modern poetry is incapable of inspiring new appreciation of beauty. I think he would though have appreciated Kenn's utterance that science is born out of, and capable of, wonder.

7. Wonder and Education

Hepburn thought wonder entails delight and surprise at an object in the world. This may be ephemeral or more lasting. Like Kenn, Hepburn believed that aesthetic wonder in nature is felt without human vanity.⁴² It is a 'glad and serene inner celebrating of the actuality of these items, these processes of nature'.⁴³ Wonder has various guises for Hepburn – it can be *worth* indulging for various reasons. Scientific inquiries are often initiated and sustained by wonder.⁴⁴ Importantly such wonder cannot *settle* scientific questions but it can *motivate* the pursuit of scientific questions. Furthermore, such wonder can, but need not, terminate when the object inspiring the wonder is more fully comprehended. There 'is room for wonder that is compatible with understanding'.⁴⁵ A more personally contemplative wonder, that makes no claim to extend understanding, is also commendable. Here early experiences of wonder can, like they did for Kenn, have lasting reverberation and meaning. Hepburn says that 'vivid sensory and emotional

³⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 214.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ronald Hepburn, 'Nature Humanised: Nature Respected', *Environmental Values*, 7 (1998), 267–79.

⁴³ Ibid., 278.

⁴⁴ Hepburn, *Wonder and Other Essays*, 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 136.

impressions from early life can continue to vivify much later and otherwise less keen experience ... the ... wide temporal gap ... is essential to the wonder-arousing synthesis'.⁴⁶ Possibilities for wonder are wide for Hepburn – it can be aesthetic, religious or existential. Wonder also has ethical potential as it has affinities with gentleness, compassion and is essentially 'other acknowledging'.⁴⁷ Hepburn suggested wonder can help agents perceive the *otherness* of others. In so doing wonder can enable moral action *for* others.

He ends his essay on *Wonder* by suggesting it is the educators task to inspire wonder in what is worthy of it, 'in place of cynicism, indifference and other rivals'.⁴⁸ Though inspiring wonder could perhaps then be regarded as an overall aim for educators in Hepburn's framework, I do not think educating subjectivity could. Reddiford however maintains that for Hepburn, all education is education of subjectivity. I disagree. Much of Hepburn's writing on education does to be sure stress that education of subjectivity is desirable and needed because it can help students see the real and wondrous and not some lazy anthropomorphism or emotion cliché. Admitting this though does not mean admitting Hepburn held *all* education is education of subjectivity. He claimed there are two distinct, if sometimes overlapping, ways to truth and knowledge about reality. Both ways can inspire wonder and help students get to reality so both are worthy of education. In his writing on education Hepburn emphasises the power the *arts* can have to educate subjectivity much more than *nature*.

This is surprising, given Hepburn elsewhere suggested that the neglect of the aesthetic import of natural beauty will only be fully overcome when aesthetic education teaches how nature can be beautiful in ways distinct from art.⁴⁹ However, Hepburn did, as we have seen, discuss the rich educational possibilities that can arise from walking in nature in his second paper on education. If his wider writings on *Wonder*⁵⁰, and the need to respect nature, and humanise it without illusion, are also considered, I ultimately think it is very clear that Hepburn felt human subjectivity could be enlarged via aesthetic appreciation of nature as well as art. Indeed, experiences in nature may even have certain educational

⁴⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁹ Hepburn, *Wonder and Other Essays*, 16–17.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

advantages over art experiences. He says that when looking upon a landscape painting ‘the light of *its* sun does not shine on me or warm me; *its* wind does not ruffle my hair. But in nature they do: I am immersed in the nature I appreciate as I cannot be with paintings. Nature is continuous with my bodily presence’.⁵¹ In sum, and contrary to Reddiford, I think it is likely that Hepburn thought it important to educate for both objectivity (through the sciences) and subjectivity (through the humanities and aesthetic appreciation of art and nature).

⁵¹ Hepburn, ‘Nature Humanised: Nature Respected’, 274.